

**Remarks By Ambassador Harry K. Thomas, Jr.
American Women's Club of the Philippines
As Delivered
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Magandang umaga sa inyong lahat. Good morning to you all. Thank you for inviting me to meet with you today. I understand you would like to know about my family and me. Well I can tell you that the women in my life – my wife, daughter, mother, sister and all my cousins – are the most important people to me.

More than 30 years ago, Ann Murphy, the spouse of Ambassador Richard Murphy, helped to found the AWCP to assist newcomers to the Philippines and provide a meeting place for American women. My family and I have been through many moves together, and we know that groups like the AWCP can make a positive difference.

Arriving in a new country with few friends or family is a scary proposition. Seemingly ordinary things like grocery shopping or driving become overwhelming. Without a support network, people quickly get lost, sometimes literally. You all recognize the importance of having a place to turn, and I'm glad the AWCP is here.

I'm also glad to see the extent of the AWCP's philanthropy. It's truly impressive. From providing scholarships for needy students, to repairing orphanage buildings, to funding medical treatment for impoverished children, your dedication to the less fortunate makes a real difference in people's lives. Be proud of your work. I am proud of your work. It is important.

I'm also a fan of the AWCP bazaar. Many members of our embassy team support the bazaar, and I am planning to do a lot of Christmas shopping there myself.

As Ambassador, I'm charged with overseeing America's relationship with the Philippines, and there's a lot I want to accomplish. I place a very high priority on serving the 150,000 Americans living in the Philippines.

Our American Citizen Services Section serves you, whether you need to register the birth of your child, renew your passport, notarize an important document, or cope with a more unfortunate situation. Like the Post Office, we'll be there, rain or shine, even through typhoons, earthquakes, and volcanic eruptions.

In an effort to better serve you, we're embracing technology, and I'm pleased to announce that last week we moved to an online appointment system for passport and notary services. Your wait times, both for an appointment and at the Embassy, will now be shorter.

I encourage you to register with us online. This allows us to contact you with important announcements and help you in case of a disaster or emergency. I also encourage you to visit our website at manila.usembassy.gov.

Now, as far as our relationship with the Philippines, let me say first that we respect the sovereignty of the Filipino people and their government. We value the friendship that has taken us through war and peace together. We need the partnership that allows our two countries to build a safer, more prosperous world for our citizens, whether they are at home or travelling in this increasingly inter-connected world.

There is one vital challenge we need to face together – trafficking in persons.

As a father, as a brother, as an Ambassador, I am horrified by the cruelty inflicted on those vulnerable individuals who become victims of trafficking. This modern day form of slavery exploits men, women and children in the Philippines, in the United States, and around the world. No one is immune from the risk of exploitation, but the young, the poor, and the hopeless are most susceptible to being robbed of their freedom.

Under Secretary de Lima's able leadership, the Philippines is stepping up its efforts in the fight against human trafficking, and I've been privileged to witness some of those efforts myself. You can count on us to do our part, by supporting those who help victims, by providing

information to responsible offices, and by sharing leads so that law enforcement from both countries can work in tandem to arrest criminals and rescue victims.

We need your help as well. I know that AWCP members are leaders and people of principle. I know you are women of action. There are many wonderful non-governmental organizations fighting against human trafficking – support them. There are many survivors of trafficking who need a helping hand – extend yours.

This is a time of hope in the Philippines, of possibility. We share that hope, and we are willing and committed partners in advancing the friendship and welfare of our two great nations.

I would now like to hear from you. I want to know your concerns and your ideas on how the Embassy and the AWCP can form a closer partnership. Thank you very much.